

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE FAMILY

Alban d'Entremont*

ABSTRACT

The concept of sustainable development refers to the need of human societies to harmonize their economic, social and demographic development with available resources and to preserve the physical environment in order to provide a better living standard for future generations. Unfortunately, that concept is often construed with the false idea that in order to achieve this harmonized and durable development, especially in the Third World countries, it is necessary to reduce the birth rates of these populations, with no respect for ethical norms or the inherent dignity of the human person. The defenders of this idea often attempt against those values that are inherent to society, including proposals that lead to the disintegration of the family as the natural institution whose essence is not subject to whims or passing fads, not even to the nobler objective of producing a better world for our children. In this paper, apart from underlining the basic and unalienable characteristics that make up the family as a natural institution that must be defended at all costs, the author proposes to show that attempts at demographic control are not only intrinsically unethical, but also not feasible in practice since they will not lead to the sustainable development of the world, but on the contrary produce negative effects that will give rise to a de-humanized society. A proposal is made in favor of the correct application of the concept of sustainable development including the eradication of structural injustices in the world and of misery in the poorer nations, and the defense of the human person and society on the basis of the promotion of the natural family as a key element in any true and effective development process.

KEY WORDS: Demography, human dignity, ethics, family, development, malthusianism, marriage, environment, society.

RESUMEN

El concepto de desarrollo sostenible se refiere a la necesidad de las sociedades humanas de armonizar su progreso económico, social y demográfico con los recursos disponibles y a preservar su ambiente físico a fin de facilitar un mejor nivel de vida a las futuras generaciones. Pero, desafortunadamente, este concepto tiende a interpretarse por lo general bajo la falsa premisa de que, si se quiere lograr ese desarrollo armónico y duradero y particularmente en los países del Tercer Mundo, es necesario disminuir los índices de natalidad de esas poblaciones sin respetar las normas éticas ni tampoco la dignidad inherente a la persona humana. Los defensores de esta idea atentan frecuentemente contra los valores intrínsecos de la sociedad, incluso con propuestas conducentes a la desintegración de la familia como institución natural cuya esencia no está subordinada a caprichos ni modas pasajeras, ni siquiera al objetivo mucho más noble de fabricar un mundo mejor para nuestros hijos.

En este artículo, aparte de subrayar las características básicas e inalienables que construyen la familia como una institución natural que debe defenderse a toda costa, el autor sugiere demostrar que los intentos dirigidos al control natal no sólo son intrínsecamente poco éticos sino también irrealizables en la práctica puesto que no habrán de conducir al desarrollo sostenible del mundo sino, por el contrario, a unos efectos negativos que darán origen a una sociedad deshumanizada. Presenta una propuesta a favor de la correcta aplicación del concepto de desarrollo sostenible, que comprende la erradicación de las injusticias estructurales del mundo y de la miseria de las naciones más pobres, así como la defensa de la persona y de la sociedad humanas con base en el fomento de la familia natural como un elemento clave en todo proceso de desarrollo eficaz y verdadero.

PALABRAS CLAVE: demografía, dignidad humana, ética, familia, desarrollo, malthusianismo, matrimonio, medio ambiente, sociedad.

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* Sociólogo y economista de la Universidad Sainte-Anne. Ph.D. en Geografía e Historia de la Universidad de Navarra. Director del Departamento de Geografía, Universidad de Navarra 31008, Pamplona- España.
Correo: alban@unav.es

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RESUMO

O conceito de desenvolvimento sustentável aponta à necessidade das sociedades humanas de ajustar o seu processo econômico, social e demográfico aos recursos disponíveis e salvaguardar o seu ambiente físico para conseguir um melhor nível de vida às gerações do amanhã. Desgraçadamente, este conceito tende a ser interpretado desde a falsa premissa de que, para conseguir este desenvolvimento harmônico e duradouro, sobretudo nos países do terceiro mundo, é necessário reduzir os índices de natalidade sem respeitar as normas éticas nem a dignidade da pessoa humana. Os defensores desta idéia socavam os valores intrínsecos da sociedade, mesmo com propostas que conduzem à desunião da família como instituição natural, cuja essência não depende dos caprichos nem das modas transitórias, nem sequer de construir um mundo melhor para os nossos filhos. Neste artigo, além de ressaltar as características físicas e inalienáveis construindo a família como uma instituição natural que deve defender-se, o autor afirma que os intuitos de controlar a natalidade não só têm pouca ética mas são irrealizáveis, já que não levarão ao desenvolvimento sustentável do mundo, mas a efeitos negativos que originarão uma sociedade desumanizada. Portanto, ele propõe que seja aplicado corretamente o conceito de desenvolvimento sustentável, que implica desterrar as injustiças estruturais do mundo e a miséria das nações mais pobres, assim como defender a pessoa e a sociedade humana, preservando a família como elemento chave em todo processo de desenvolvimento eficaz e verdadeiro.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: demografia, humana do dignidad, ética, familia, desarrollo, malthusianismo, matrimonio, ambiente do medio, sociedad.

The awareness of the fact that the many demographic, social, cultural and economic imbalances of our planet are global problems that operate on a world-wide scale (and not only at regional or local levels) and are current realities having historical implications with repercussions in the future, as well as multiple implications for individuals and social groups, is slowly emerging among the institutions and citizens that make up humanity.

This growing awareness has led the international community and many individuals to ask themselves the following basic question: Is the economic expansion of the world, especially in the so-called developed countries, so heavily dependent on the rapid and massive usage of limited natural resources that it is linked to multiple aggressions on the physical environment, destroying the very foundation upon which the economic and social structures of the world are based,

thereby posing a real threat in the face of a durable development of the planet in the medium and long term? In other words: Is the present-day rate and manner of producing and consuming goods, in the global society, gravely jeopardizing the possibility of achieving the true progress of humanity in the near and distant future?

At the center of this growing awareness, which has become quite generalized in recent decades, along with the acceptance of the topic of the environment as a matter of global interest (and not merely as a small scale or marginal issue) is a relatively new notion: that of *sustainable development*

THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The notion of *ecology* owes its sociological acceptance to the Stockholm Conference on the

Environment in 1972, whereas this new notion -*sustainable development*- owes its systematic definition and widespread recognition to the World Commission on Environment and Development, which published its famous discussion paper (better known as the Brundtland Report) in 1987, with the title *Our Common Future*.

The concept of sustainable development became generalized, above all, during and after the World Conference on the Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This concept has subsequently received a great deal of attention in scientific, economic and political arenas and is well documented in certain specialized literature of the last decade.

The notion of sustainable development, according to its original and correct meaning, can be expressed in the following terms:

It depicts a situation of human progress in which economic change is occurring -namely the increase in the production and consumption of material goods and services, but without correlative damage being wrought on the environment in the medium or long term, nor the massive depletion or destruction of natural resources.

It is a notion that is applied to the improvement of living conditions in the poorer countries of the world. That is to say, changes have to be made in order for those countries, which are so heavily dependent on their material resources and prod-

ucts for their very economic and political survival, to be able to achieve a harmonious development process at the present moment without having to sacrifice the well-being of future generations.

It is not yet a reality, but a project for the future, often clashing with the present social, political and economic structures of the world (especially those of the First World) in a global society which has only partially assumed the challenge of bringing about the primordial objective of satisfying present-day needs without endangering the possibility for future generations to satisfy their own necessities and to procure a state of widespread well-being among their citizens.

A fairly complete technical and objective expression or definition of the notion of sustainable development would have to include the idea that it is a concept according to which long-term economic and social growth can only be achieved in association and harmony with nature, counter-balancing perverse environmental impacts and neutralizing aggressive actions against the physical milieu. This has to be brought about within the framework of a process in which culture, wealth and well being have to be re-distributed in the world, and therefore it implies the eradication of poverty and of the grave and flagrant injustices and imbalances that are prevalent in our present-day planet.

With barely fifteen years having elapsed since its inception, the concept of sustainable development is now present in many forums and is located at the upper echelons of priorities as expressed by many of

the most influential institutions in the world, such as the United Nations Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the European Union etc, as well as in a large number of Non Governmental Organizations (not all of which, as we shall see, wholly or even partially agree with the original or correct definition of the concept).

It can thus be affirmed that sustainable development is, first and foremost, an economic concept, but it has to be pointed out that it also embraces a profound and fundamental ethical and human dimension. This dimension has to be present in the definition of the concept in its correct perspective; that is, the definition must refer, to the future generations and the physical environment, but always within the context of the re-distribution of culture and wealth, and the eradication of poverty in the world. This converts the idea of sustainable development into a radical concept and into a dangerous notion according to certain interests or ideologies, as will be pointed out in certain detail in this essay.

A characteristic feature of the concept of sustainable development, as has been stated, is its focus on the environment at two levels: the social level (concern for the welfare of present-day and future societies) and the economic level (concern for natural resources and the responsibility of the entrepreneurial and business sectors). However, as has also been hinted, the concept of sustainable development is not exempt of vested interests, controversies, skepticism, ideological approaches and distortions and outright dismissal. In this vein, a number of scientists, entrepreneurs and politicians not especially vested with benevolence have been

quick to state that the only merit of the Brundtland Commission has been that of popularizing the term “sustainable development,” without establishing concrete lines of action or unequivocal criteria for its correct application.

This brings to mind the controversy and errors that are associated with another relatively new concept: that of *biodiversity* (the defense and protection of all forms of life); the arguments in favor and against, as well as the scientific and ideological stances that are taken, are often the same in both cases. Frequently, the notions of biodiversity and sustainable development are mixed, misinterpreted or intentionally distorted, not only in intellectual and academic circles, but also -and perhaps foremost- in the ambits of economic and political action. All this brings about important ramifications vis-à-vis the spheres of ecology and of human society.

Along these lines we come across the attempts to legitimize a so-called *biology of population* on the part of those individuals and institutions who hold the opinion that the human being embodies nothing else but the idea of a mere “distinction of species” with regard to other forms of life (“deep ecology”). According to this erroneous and dangerous perspective, ecology, as a sub-discipline of biology, is framed within a holistic structure which does not easily accept particular and divergent stances, such as the one which in this context upholds and proclaims the inherent dignity of the human person, above and beyond any other considerations or values, and therefore the pre-eminence of human beings within creation and the absolute necessity to uphold and defend human life above and beyond any other considerations or values.

As a consequence of this incorrect approach, in the same manner in which according to the Neo-Malthusian ideology, what is proclaimed and fostered is the programming of the human population within economic and social coordinates that are supposedly immovable, the warped approach of sustainable development aims at programming the human species, that is promoting demographic control, in order to protect -at the same level of importance- animal and plant species in the face of a supposed threat posed by humans with their production and consumption of natural resources.

Human beings, according to this distorted and pessimistic view, are not considered globally or individually as creators and builders of the planet, but fundamentally and essentially as predators and destroyers of the earth.

Against this most erroneous and dangerous approach, which has been denounced by many authors in recent years, it has to be clearly affirmed that sustainable development must not solely be considered as an economic and ecological concept, but rather it must be based upon the reality of the existence of a strong relationship of inter-dependence between the natural world and human society, but absolute priority must be given to the latter sphere. Therefore, rather than understanding sustainable development as a concept that is merely or mainly economic or ecological, it has to be considered, fundamentally and essentially, as a concept that is profoundly *social and anthropological*.

In a word, it could be said that in order to achieve sustainable development in the most complete and cor-

rect sense of the expression, action has to be taken along the lines of what we could call an *integral approach*, and not from the stance of the partial or skewed approaches that are often presented in the international organizations and institutions mentioned above. That is to say, in order for sustainable development to be true development, it has to have, as its primordial aim, the *safeguarding of the welfare of the human person*.

Some of the concrete actions that have to be taken in order to bring about this true sustainable development could be outlined in conformity with the following general coordinates:

The promotion of sound scientific knowledge regarding environmental problems and the seeking of realistic and feasible solutions to these problems.

Advancement in the promulgation of correct legislation in agreement with the findings of scientific evidence.

The search for lasting remedies to environmental problems and the application of definitive solutions on a global scale.

The promotion of the social and economic development of people whilst respecting, at all times, their value systems and traditional modes of living.

The eradication of poverty in the less favored nations of the world, and the fight against imbalances and inequalities worldwide.

These imbalances and inequalities are of a geographical, social and demographic nature, but they are mainly economic and, above all, cultural and anthropological. This is how the concept of sustainable development has to be approached, by shying away from any type of unilateral, dogmatic and globalizing stances such as those that are frequently projected from different political, social and economic ambits. A particularly dangerous position is the attempt to introduce, within the very concept of sustainable development or -even more so- as one of its essential elements, the idea that sustainable development can not be achieved unless there is wholesale birth control applied to the nations of the Third World. This position stems from the false belief that there are certain inherent and immovable “demographic laws” that determine the future of humanity and which conform to what some authors call the *economics of population*.

These attempts at legitimizing an “economics of population” and of asserting “demographic laws” that are supposedly unquestionable, are not a new matter. They were first voiced over two hundred years ago in the works of Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), especially in his best-selling *First Essay on the Principle of Population* (1803), as well as in the postulates on population to be found in some early schools of economic thinking during the so-called Enlightenment, in the Eighteenth Century, such as the Mercantilists and the Physiocrats, and in Adam Smith, the first great theoretician of the Capitalist system or of the so-called market economy.

According to this mode of thinking, the human population constitutes a fairly stable operational factor

within the framework of the requisites that are needed in order to assure economic growth, which is considered to be a clear historical necessity. Therefore, population can -and *must*- be programmed, the same as with the other elements that make up this process of inevitable progress. And given the fact that the “principle” that Malthus thought he had discovered is an unquestionable reality -always according to him- birth control becomes an urgent necessity, no less than to assure the very survival of the human species on the long term. This is why Malthus was not afraid to set his proposal of birth control within the framework of a “moral duty”.

There is no need to insist on the scientific naïveté of Malthus’ thesis, and -above all- on the total lack of coincidence between his doomsday prophecy and what has occurred in the world in the last two hundred years. Not only have birth rates in the world not followed at all along the lines he postulated in his *Essay*, but neither have any of the catastrophes he and his followers foresaw as being inevitable in the ambits of food production and hunger, the exhaustion of natural resources, the increase in mortality, overpopulation, or the lack of living space come about. Neither is there any evidence that these catastrophes will be produced in the future, the contrary being the case.

False “demographic laws” are used as an excuse to stall or prevent the application of the correct concept of sustainable development, by placing the blame for underdevelopment on “irresponsible reproduction habits” on the part of the poorer nations, the same as Malthus did when he wrote about the irresponsible reproductive behavior of the “inferior social classes”.

And yet it has not been shown in any way that increased demographic growth is an impediment towards development, whereas the birth dearth being experienced in the western nations, which has led to the massive ageing of population structures and a notable lack of youth, for example, is indeed a very serious obstacle standing in the way of development; sustainable or otherwise.

Rather, in order to bring about true sustainable development, instead of looking towards demographics, we must first of all set our eyes upon politics and economics. From these points of view, reforms have to be made within present-day political and economic structures, in such a way that instead of harming the environment, society may attain reconciliation with nature by using both politics and economics as instruments and tools to preserve and improve the physical world we live in.

The imbalances and inequalities that persist in the world will be remedied by way of a more just distribution of knowledge, culture and wealth at the global scale, as is being affirmed by many experts who are not influenced by ideologies or hidden agendas. But this new distribution, for some, entails an unacceptable condition, because the elimination of these imbalances and inequalities will necessarily imply a new distribution of power, thus upsetting the *status quo* of the economic and political forces operating in the present-day world along the well known lines of “haves” and “have nots” or -more technically, although not strictly accurate from a geographical standpoint- “the north-south divide”.

The harsh fact is that there are forces within the realms of economics and politics which prefer to

maintain the existing unequal and unjust distribution of culture, wealth and well-being which operates to their benefit. In order to achieve this goal, instead of working in favor of sustainable development (to which they however often pay lip service), they aim at controlling the population of the poorer nations by appealing to an ill-conceived “economics of population” and proclaimed but non-existing “inherent demographic laws”.

These supposed laws are not based on science, but on ideology. They do not promote truly inherent or essential values -which are not the values of economics or politics, but the values of human persons- and they are founded on self-serving vested interests, but do not address those needs which are proper to humanity on the whole.

From a truly ethical and anthropological perspective (that is, leaving aside power structures, ideologies, pseudo-science and economic, political or social forces) and properly at the level of individual persons, many changes have to be made as well in order to conform to the correct notion of sustainable development. These changes fall along the lines of *new values* that must be implemented in order to move sustainable development from its embryonic stage towards full maturity.

These new values transcend the economy and the environment. They contemplate the economy and the environment from one unique correct and complete perspective, which is the global view of total interaction between the natural milieu and human society. These new values, therefore, entail the establishment

of a new economic and ecological paradigm, which for all practical purposes would necessarily have to be a new social and cultural paradigm.

Apart from the love of nature, the appreciation for the conservation of all living species and the struggle against the depletion and wastage of resources and contamination, for example, the new values that would have to be instilled in both individuals and institutions (perhaps more so in the latter), as has often been pointed out by scores of contemporary authors, should include, among others, the following:

The search for efficient means and methods to promote and preserve the precarious situation of peace in the world.

Respect for life in all its forms, as encompassed in the correct and full notion of biodiversity, but with absolute priority given to human life at all times.

The staunch and unrelenting struggle to uproot all forms of structural poverty and imbalances in the world.

The abandonment of the irresponsible consumption and wastage of material resources and goods so typical of the so-called "opulent society".

The rejection of sectarian and inefficient attempts at controlling the demographic structures and the reproductive behavior of people in the poorer nations.

The promotion of an ethical, ecological and aesthetic educational and cultural mentality at all levels of human society.

It is only with the inclusion of these new values (conforming to what we could call an authentic *ecological conscience* in agreement with the respect for the physical world, with the possibilities of the global society and especially with the inherent dignity of the human person) that the world community will be able to solve all the problems associated with the economy, resources and the environment. This is the only way to achieve the future development of our planet in a truly sustainable and sustained manner.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FAMILY

At first glance, one might be inclined to believe that sustainable development, both as a concept and as a reality, bears very little connection with the concept and reality of the *family*. Yet, as has been amply explained in the previous section, it has been made clear that the concept and reality of sustainable development must be framed within coordinates that transcend the economy and politics, and that this development will be feasible only if we take into account that it has to be solidly rooted in a dimension that is essentially *human*, and not only economic and political.

The chains and fetters of need and insufficiency, which is how under-development in the world can be characterized, are forged with iron and steel grips that prevent the freedom of individuals to procure for themselves higher levels of well-being that is not only

nor primordially economic, but essentially social and cultural, that is to say *personal*. From this reality stems the fact that the most faithful indicators of development and under-development in the economic and social order, in the ultimate instance, must be referred to the “human flesh” of the citizens of the world, more than to economic systems, geographical ambits or political structures. It is within the context of this human and personal dimension of sustainable development that the family comes to the fore.

As has been hinted in the previous section, any type of true and sustained development necessarily implies the betterment of the quality of human relations, not only between human beings and their geographical and physical surroundings, but essentially between all persons as members of human society. The search for alternative structures and new values for the improvement of human relations at the present moment is however often based upon a fundamental error, entailing the production of *counter-values* which eventually give rise to the worsening of human relations at all levels.

This fundamental error consists of the loss, on the part of individuals and institutions, of the deep and true meaning of the nature of human beings as *persons*. Disoriented as per the requirements that derive from this human condition, and often frustrated in the face of the failures of so many models invoked by so many false ideologies, individuals and institutions, nowadays, seem incapable of apprehending the importance of rooting any model of development, not solely on economic or political structures, but primordially on the real and natural base of society, and that base is none other than the *family*.

In the most diverse ambits of society and according to the most varied attitudes referring to the progress of the world in the social and economic order, there arise a number of negative consequences that are no more than the reflection of the disorientation that exists with respect to a deep and fundamental ambit which is more essential and basic, namely *what it means to be a human being*.

Moreover, given the fact that for all practical purposes, relationships between the person and the family, between the family and society, and between society and development are so narrow and so profoundly linked, that the weakening of the idea of the inherent dignity of the human person not only leads to the reality of a de-humanized family, but also to a reality of a de-humanizing society. This makes it impossible, for all practical purposes, to efficiently apply any model of development (even such a comprehensive and laudable idea as that of sustainable development.) Any idea, concept or project of present or future development not based on the true meaning of the human person and on the role played by the family within society, is destined to failure even before getting off the drawing board.

In a parallel but contrary manner, the re-encounter of human individuals with the natural requirements of the dignity of the human being as a person, opens the door to a personalized family and to a personalizing society. What is at stake, at the present moment, is the *natural essence of the family*, and stemming from this natural essence, the humanization and personalization of society. This is the only manner of achieving any type of true economic and social development in the world, today and tomorrow.

It is important to note that whereas other human realities in the world have been evolving in a continuous manner throughout the centuries -indeed, as prime examples, we have the constantly shifting nature of economic and political structures- the reality of the family is substantially and essentially the same today as it was from the beginning of time. Although, there have always been many more or less sophisticated theories regarding this reality, in spite of the passing of time, the family continues to be a living and loving community of husbands, wives, parents, children and relatives which has been subject to only minute and accidental changes throughout the ages, touching on certain forms, manners and other aspects that do not affect its essential nature.

This explains the extreme weakness of any ideological discourse on the family: the family is a *natural* reality based on the sexual differentiation of males and females, and the most favorable “environment” for the socialization, personal growth, sustenance, development and education of offspring. The marriage bond and the essential structure of the family are not merely transitory elements devoid of any true meaning, nor elements that are foreign to human nature, nor non-appropriate artificial frameworks for the achievement of the ultimate ends of human existence.

In spite of this self-evident truth which has persisted and proven itself time and time again in the face of multiple crises and which has withstood the onslaught of so many threats, in today’s modern world and in many individuals and representative institutions, we often come across attitudes and approaches referring to the family which do not respond to positions based on eth-

ical foundations nor on the recognition of the family as an essential human bond which stems from human nature and thus conforms to natural law (which, by the way, is also frequently questioned or outright rejected).

These erroneous attitudes and approaches, which are often put forth, for example, in a number of incorrect definitions or proposed applications of the notion of sustainable development, include, among others, the following:

The consideration of the family, not as a natural reality, but as a mere social structure which is more or less sophisticated and which stems from some sort of legal sanction or social circumstances susceptible of change according to the will or whim of legislators, institutions or individuals.

A certain infatuation regarding extra-marital formulae for individual sexual plenitude and the procreation and education of offspring, with the promotion of false “family structures” not akin to the natural family as it has stood traditionally, and the pretension of placing these false structures on an equal legal and social footing with the natural family.

The warped tendency to place the blame for individual failures concerning marriage and the family, not on the failures of the implicated individuals themselves, but squarely on the institutions of marriage and the family.

Contrary to the foregoing postulates, the achievement of the plenitude that derives from the natural reality of

the family bears no connection whatsoever to any type of artificial structure. Rather, this plenitude is the ripened and conquered fruit that is reaped from the reciprocal, persevering and irrevocable will of two persons of different sex who are the main protagonists of their own realization as husbands, wives, parents and educators. When this salient will exists, the sole “structure” that accommodates itself to human nature and social reality -the best “ecological milieu”, we could say, by borrowing a phrase from the concept of sustainable development- is marriage, in the same way that the best “natural environment” for the achievement of plenitude on the part of children and youngsters is a proper stable home presided over by loving and responsible parents of opposite sex.

If we remove ourselves from this natural framework and try to establish human society or the future economic and social development of the world on structures that differ from that of the natural family, any other type of configuration, no matter how original or extravagant it may happen to be, will necessarily be non-operational and therefore destined to failure. This is what has been happening in the world today, especially in the western nations, in which these elementary truths have been forgotten or at best have not effectively been incorporated within the framework of what constitutes the real progress of humanity.

This brings about a number of evils that challenge or directly attack any approach or application of sustainable development which, as has often been stated in this essay, necessarily must germinate and grow in the ripe soil of the natural essence of the human being as an individual and as a person, and in the essential

nature of the family as the basic unit of society. Among others, these evils include:

The trivial treatment of the marriage bond as a natural reality and of the family as a natural institution: it is frequent to find many cases, nowadays, in which short-lived, frivolous and immature infatuations or relationships, or even vested interests, purely and simply, incite individuals to don and discard husbands and wives as if they were mere utilitarian objects.

The replacement of the very essence of marriage and the family, and of their true ends, with a merely juridical or legalistic notion that is totally foreign to the true nature of these realities.

The increase in the belief that “marrying” and forming a “family” are merely acts of social conformity with the aim of being capable of carrying out intimate inter-personal relationships with public and legal “honorability”.

The increase in the ambiguity as per what really constitutes marriage and the family, these terms being given in an almost indiscriminate manner to any kind of extraordinarily diverse and contradictory types of inter-personal unions, a reality which is especially and ironically prevalent in the so-called “developed nations”.

This state of affairs, or rather of disarray, ends up diluting the natural and precise meaning of the family and necessarily leads to the replacement of the

family by legalistic and socially conventional surrogate definitions and structures which are devoid of any type of truth or meaning -except for the fact that, sadly, these definitions and structures are frequently perceived as being “politically correct” in this day and age.

The truth and meaning referring to the family, its true nature and reality, is not to be found in the sum of services which it provides, neither in its usefulness within certain social, economic or political structures. Rather, it is to be found in the requirements of the radical solidarity and in the communion of love that derive from the human condition and from the inherent dignity of the human person.

This is what causes individuals to create permanent bonds for mutual help and the generation of new lives, and not legal or social sanctions, artificial structures, whims or passing fads. Collectively, this is what creates human society, not political or economic structures or systems, not ideologies or vested interests.

If we borrow anew an expression from the concept of sustainable development, we could define the family and the home as the prime “natural habitat” of the human individual, the place where he or she comes to achieve his or her full realization and true fulfillment as a human person. And it is only with this individual realization and fulfillment -that is to say, the “development” of the human person- that the full realization and the true fulfillment of society will be achieved -that is to say, the “development” of the peoples and nations of the world.

Therefore, as a summary and to justify the title and contents of this article, it can be stated that, in our opinion, it is not at all far-fetched to relate the reality of the family to the concept of sustainable development. To not have done so in recent years must be counted among the reasons why the overall panorama of human society is so desolate and sterile at the present moment, as is shown by so many chilling indicators.

Just to name a few: the great divide between rich and poor nations; the shame and scandal of abandoned and mistreated children; the attempts at demographic control; the exploitation of women and youngsters; the lack of decent housing and living quarters; the lack of respect for the elderly and the incapacitated; the breakdown of a stable hierarchy of true values; the promotion of contraception, divorce, abortion, euthanasia, same-sex “marriages” and other “family” structures that run counter to the ultimate ends of the individual, the family and society. All this, as has been stated several times already in this article, in turn runs counter to the real progress of humanity, that is to say, counter to the real development of our planet.

The extent to which the approaches and actions of those individuals vested with social, economic or political authority are truly deficient in their stances regarding the human individual, the family and the natural make-up of society, and the extent to which citizens do not carry out all that which is within our reach to contribute towards making the home and the family the natural habitat for the full realization of individuals -a redoubt of love and solidarity that is a requirement of human dignity- convert the family into

a terribly critical mirror which reflects the de-personalized and de-humanized society of the present-day world.

Therefore, the family is much more narrowly related to the realm of economic and social development than many would think or affirm at first glance. This is the reason why it is urgent and necessary to apply solutions that indeed are political, economic and ecological, but more than anything else solutions that are anthropological and ethical. It is precisely here that the family, as a natural institution at the base of society, has such a great role to play. Only thus can sustainable development be understood, and only thus will this development operate to the good of humanity.

After all that has been said, it can again clearly and unequivocally be stated, without a shadow of a doubt, that only a sustainable and sustained family can lead to true sustainable and sustained development.

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